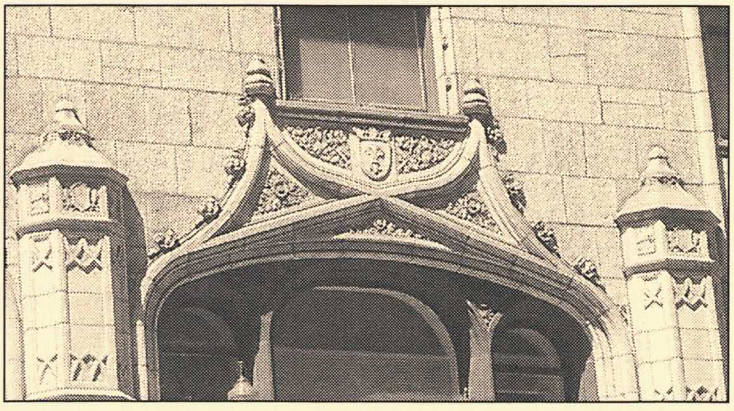
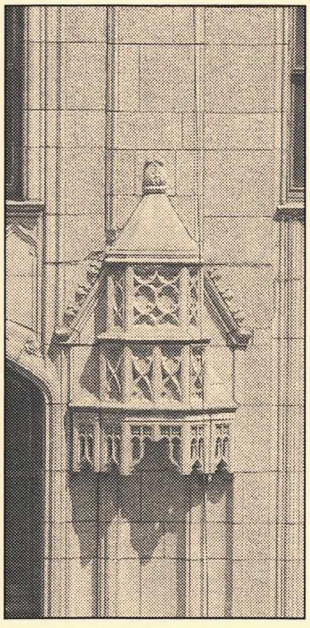
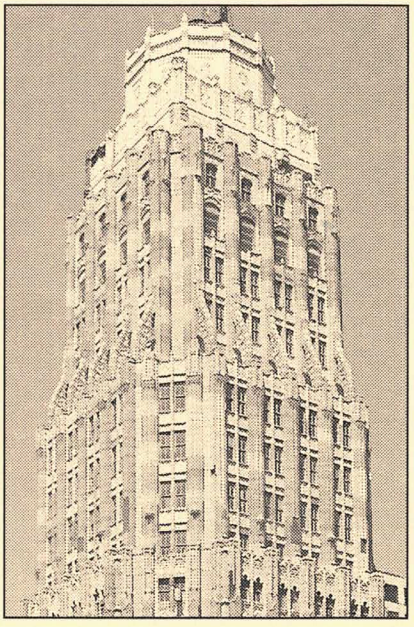
PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION







Steuben Club Building

188 W. Randolph Street

Submitted to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in June 2006

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Lori T. Healey, Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks.

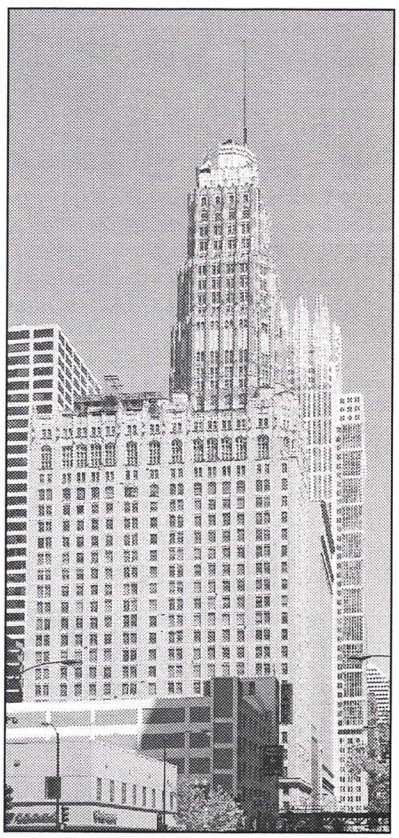
The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council following a detailed designation process. It begins with a staff report on the historical and architectural background and significance of the proposed landmark. The next step is a vote by the Landmarks Commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. Not only does this preliminary vote initiate the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until the final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

Please note that this landmark designation report is subject to possible revision during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance approved by City Council should be regarded as final.

Steuben Club Building

(Now known as the Randolph Tower Building)
188 West Randolph Street

Built: 1929
Architect: Karl M. Vitzthum & Co.

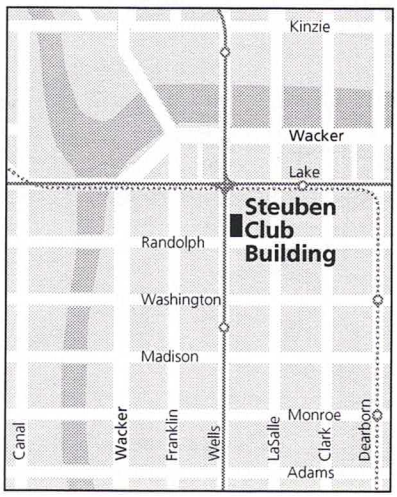


With its visually dramatic tower, the Steuben Club Building is one of Chicago's finest 1920s-era skyscrapers, built during the decade when the city's distinctive skyline took much of its present-day profile. Built as a multi-purpose building housing a private club and rental offices, the Steuben Club Building is a fine example of a terra cotta–clad building designed in the Gothic Revival style, with its pointed arches, tracery, buttresses and finials.

Designed by the noteworthy Chicago firm of Karl M. Vitzthum & Co., the Steuben Club Building reflects the importance of the city's pioneering 1923 zoning ordinance, which mandated that skyscrapers above a certain height have setbacks from the lot line. This 45-story building exhibits Vitzthum's dexterity with the verticality of skyscraper form, and the Steuben Club Building is a prominent visual landmark in the Loop skyline. Vitzthum is significant in Chicago architecture as the designer of the One North LaSalle Building (a designated Chicago Landmark) and the Home Bank and Trust Company Building (proposed Chicago Landmark).

The Steuben Club of Chicago and its Building

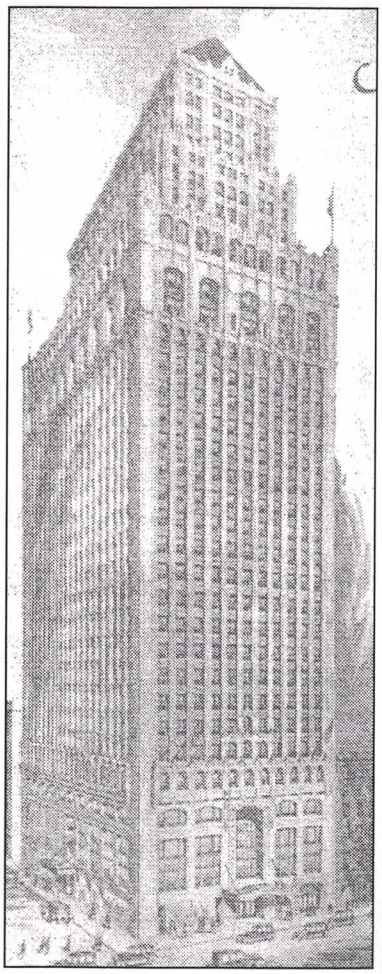
In 1928, the 2,500-member Steuben Club of Chicago began the planning of its imposing new club building, with an opulent dining room, club rooms, and recreation facilities, including a swimming pool. The Steuben Club Building in Chicago was the most prominent clubhouse of this national organization. After all the negative, anti-German propaganda of World War I, German-Americans wanted to put forth a positive image of themselves and their culture. A massive immigration between 1820 and 1930 brought 5.6 million German residents to the United States. This had a great effect on Chicago's ethnic make-up, with nearly a quarter of the city's population being either first or second generation immigrants. These German-Americans stayed connected through a large network of social events and clubs. The club was led by many important German-American businessmen of the day, who chose a prominent site in the downtown district. Two of these men were Franz Sigel, a political refugee and editor of the *New York Monthly*, a German paper; and George Schneider, editor and publisher of the *Staats Zeitung* and president of the First National Bank.

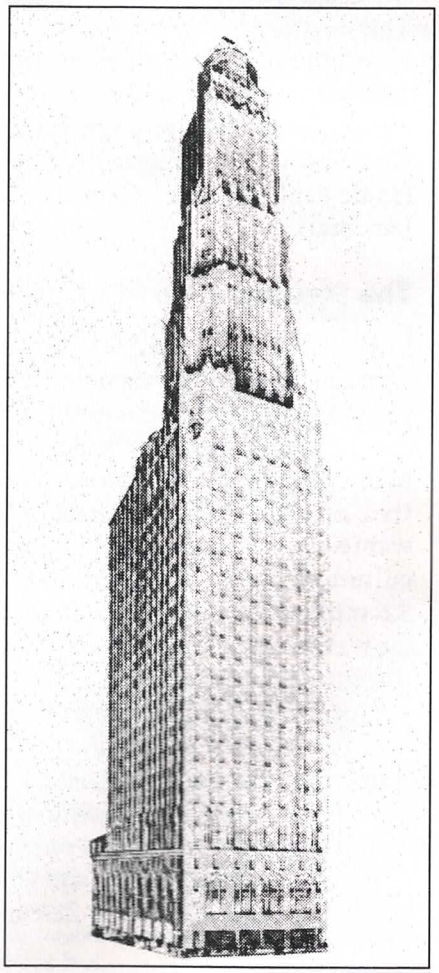


The Steuben Club was named for Baron von Steuben, a Prussian officer who joined Washington at Valley Forge in 1778 and who is credited with turning the undisciplined soldiers into a real army. During the 1778–79 winter in Valley Forge, he wrote the "Regulation for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States," which became known as the Blue Book, the army's standard drill manual. Thus the name Steuben came to symbolize to many German immigrants their pride and patriotism in America. In 1930, the bicentenary of his birth, he was honored with a U.S. postage stamp.

There were numerous organizations and movements in the United States founded by German-Americans and dedicated to Revolutionary War General Friedrich Wilhelm Augustin, Baron von Steuben (1730-1794). It was felt that the name was symbolic of patriotism, reminding and reassuring Americans that German-Americans were true to the country. Baron von Steuben was a Prussian officer who joined Washington at Valley Forge in 1778 and is credited with turning the undisciplined soldiers into a real army. During the 1778-79 winter in Valley Forge, he wrote the "Regulation for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States," which became known as the Blue Book, the army's standard drill manual. Due to his quick and successful training of troops, Washington soon appointed him inspector general, and Steuben became a great asset in the Revolutionary War. Thus the name Steuben came to symbolize to many German immigrants their pride and patriotism in America. Von Steuben High School on the Northwest side of Chicago was also named after this important figure.

Beginning during the First World War and afterwards, German immigrants found themselves the targets of negative sentiment and discrimination. In 1919, in the aftermath of the war, patriotic





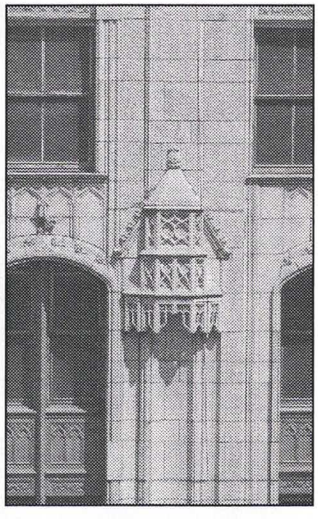
An early drawing (right) of the Steuben Club Building, before it had its strikingly tall polygonal tower, and a later brochure cover showing the completed building.

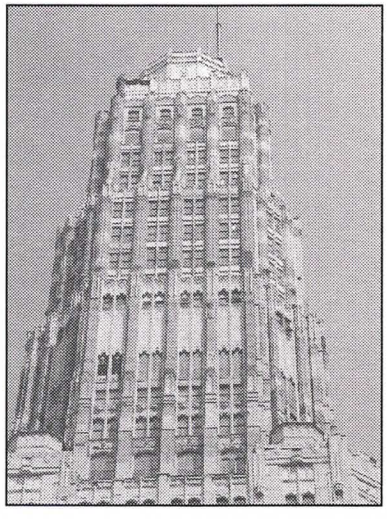
Americans of German descent founded the Steuben Society of America to educate citizens on the patriotic contributions and to encourage German-Americans to take an active role in civic affairs. This social club served as a way for German-Americans to illustrate the positive aspects of their culture—and themselves. Many of the members of the Steuben Club also rented offices in the building—they were mostly doctors, small businessmen, lawyers and other professionals.

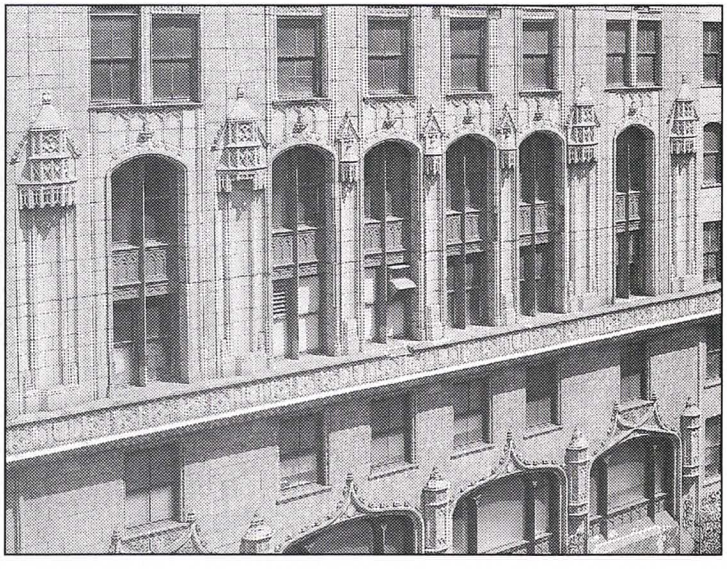
The Steuben Club Building was designed to house retail space and professional offices on its first twenty-one stories and the Steuben Club itself, which had signed a twenty-five year lease on the top floors. The building cost $3,500,000 to build, with the Steuben Club serving as mortgage co-grantor for the 188 Randolph Building Corporation, which was the building's owner of record.

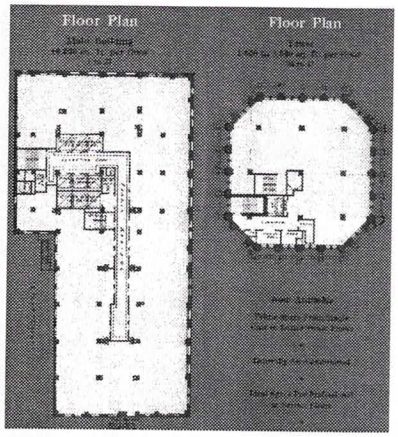
The Steuben Club quickly became a popular club in Chicago. Unlike many of the existing societies, a goal of the club was the

The Steuben Club Building, located at the northeast corner and West Randolph Street and North Wells Street, was built in 1929. The forty-five story skyscraper has a twenty-seven story base topped with a visually distinctive polygonal tower that terminates 463 feet in the air.







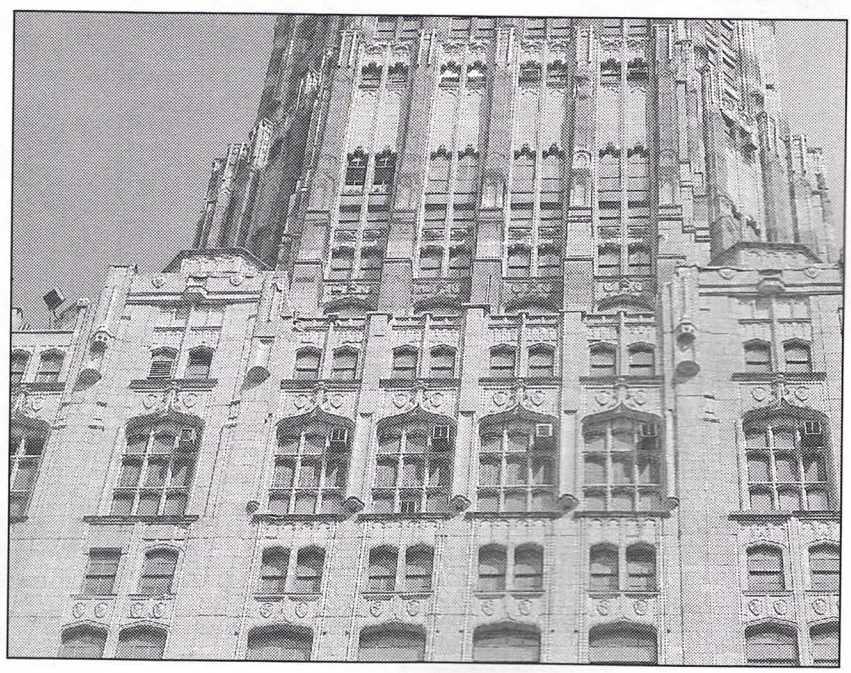


Typical floorplans for the base and tower, from a historic brochure of the buliding.

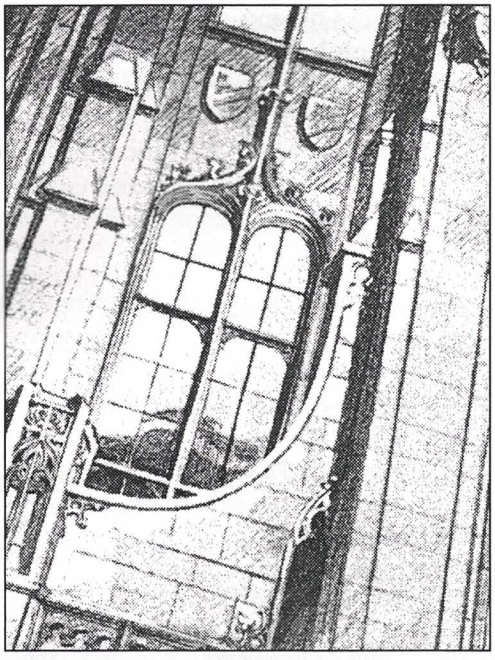
construction of a club house to serve as a center for social activities and cultural pursuits. It was hoped that the Steuben Club model would be projected to other cities, forming a national institution of clubs with reciprocal privileges. This may well have happened had it not been for the stock market crash and subsequent economic depression.

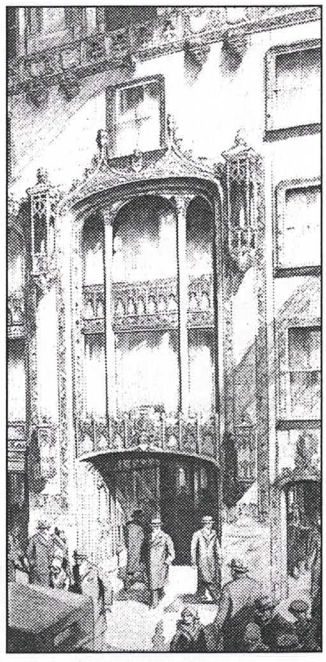
Building Description

The Steuben Club Building is located at the northeast corner of West Randolph Street and North Wells Street in the northwest section of Chicago's Loop, just south of the Chicago River. The building extends approximately 80 feet along Randolph Street and 181 feet along Wells Street. The forty-five story skyscraper has a twenty-seven story base, topped with its slender, eighteen-story polygonal tower that terminates 463 feet in the air.



The Steuben Club Building has many fine terra cotta details, including pointed arches, finials, and stylized flying buttresses.





The Steuben Club Building was designed with many fine Gothic-Revival details, evident in these fine drawings of an upper-story window and the building's main entrance from Randolph Street.

The Steuben Club Building is one of Chicago's most visually distinctive 1920s-era skyscrapers. It is clad primarily in buff-colored terra cotta, with white terra cotta on the upper section of the tower to make the top more light-reflective. A profusion of Gothic Revival-style ornament covers the building. Multi-story pointed arches are the major decorative visual elements and form a simple, yet stately, visual pattern on the building. Dramatic-looking, buttress-like finials mark building corners on the twenty-third floor, each bay of the building's balustrade, and the corners of the twenty-seventh floor.

The tower of the Steuben Club Building, which begins at the 28th floor, has a series of setbacks that give it its prominent "telescopic" set-back appearance. At the fortieth-floor setback, two-story-tall flying buttresses demarcate the building's status as a new urban cathedral. More prominent decorative terra cotta is located at each of the setbacks, leading the eye to the twelve-sided building "cap."

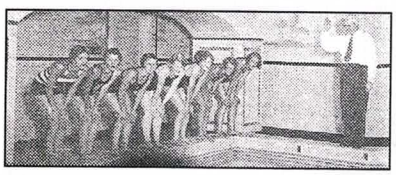
The Steuben Club Building's combination of multiple uses (including, in this case, club, retail and office space) followed a long-time practice for downtown Chicago buildings. Prominent early examples of such multi-use buildings include Adler & Sullivan's Auditorium Building, with its hotel, office space, and grand theater, as well as the Masonic Temple Building at State and Randolph (demolished), with both office space and club rooms.

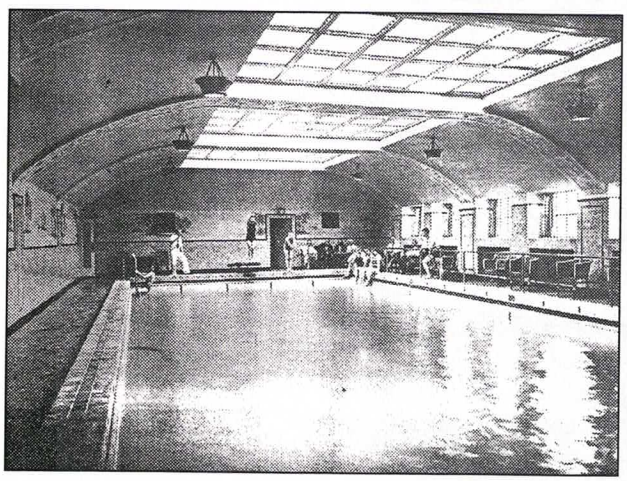
The economically practical combination of spaces lessened the financial risk of building incurred by single-purpose buildings on expensive land in Chicago's Loop. Development in this urban environment had become viciously competitive, and escalating real estate prices made any property investment a substantial one.

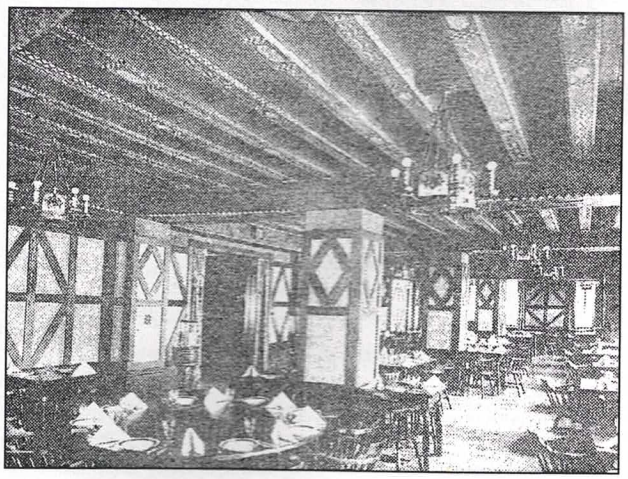
The Steuben Club Building's prominent downtown location made it an excellent candidate to combine club space with retail and office space. Since club members were given first preference on renting space, the building's offices were initially filled largely with club members. Due to the building's prominent location, this advantage furthered the Steuben Club's mission of making German-American businesses fit in to the bustling, economically thriving Chicago Loop.

In the years following the stock market crash of 1929, the Steuben Club Building suffered the same lack of tenancy as all the skyscrapers in Chicago's Loop. In the 1950s, long after the Steuben Club itself had ceased to occupy the building, the building was partially remodeled, and the first-floor exterior and lobby were simplified in the more stripped-down modern style of the day. The building's upper floors remained largely in use as offices, but the fitness facilities and swimming pool created for the Steuben Club remained in use as health club facilities.

When the Steuben Club was in operation, facilities included an elegant dining room, shown here in 1929. The murals and room arrangement were the work of Adolph Hercz and Gustave Brand. (This space has since been altered and subdivided). A traditional German rathskellar (lower right) once occupied the building's basement. The skylit swimming pool on an upper floor of the building (below) is used today by a private health club.







Chicago Skyscraper Design in the 1920s

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chicago grew to become America's second-largest city. As a national center of industry, commerce, and finance, the city developed a city center—the "Loop." The innovative "skyscraper" building type was developed largely by Chicago architects in response to economic forces, building technology advances, and both natural and manmade constraints to development that were present in the city, and soon these structures dominated Chicago's core. The restraints to downtown development created by geographic factors (Lake Michigan and the Chicago River), combined with manmade barriers (the railroad yards south of the Loop and the warehouse districts along the river) and high land prices, encouraged Chicago real estate developers to build up rather than out. The development of the new building technologies such as skeleton-frame construction, reliable elevators, and electricity made skyscrapers possible.

In the 1920s, however, Chicago's downtown began to expand outward from its traditional boundaries. New development along the Chicago River itself was encouraged by the 1909 *Plan of Chicago*, which called for the redevelopment of the city's riverfront warehouse district with a grand boulevard lined with office buildings. Wacker Drive, as the innovative double-decked street was called, opened in 1926 on the former site of the city's wholesale produce district. In response, builders constructed new skyscrapers along and near Wacker Drive in the late 1920s. The Steuben Club Building, although not fronting on Wacker itself, benefited from the new focus on the Loop's northern edge for office development.

The overall form of the Steuben Club Building, with its distinctive set-back tower rising from a large base, reflects changes in building design brought about by Chicago's 1923 zoning ordinance. Prior to 1893, the height of Chicago buildings was restricted only by the limits of building technologies such as skeleton-frame construction or caisson foundations. However, a perceived glut of available office space that year led the city to create a legal building height

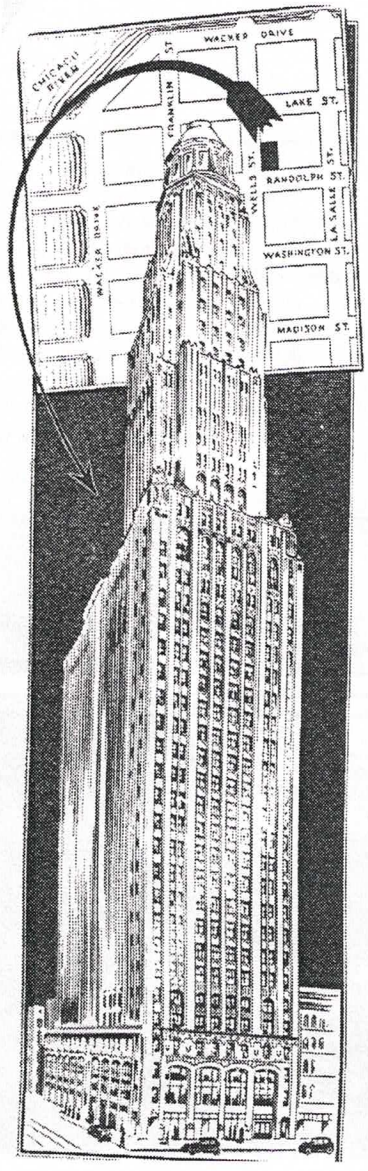
The Steuben Club's 463-foot tower provided splendid skyline views from the club floors.

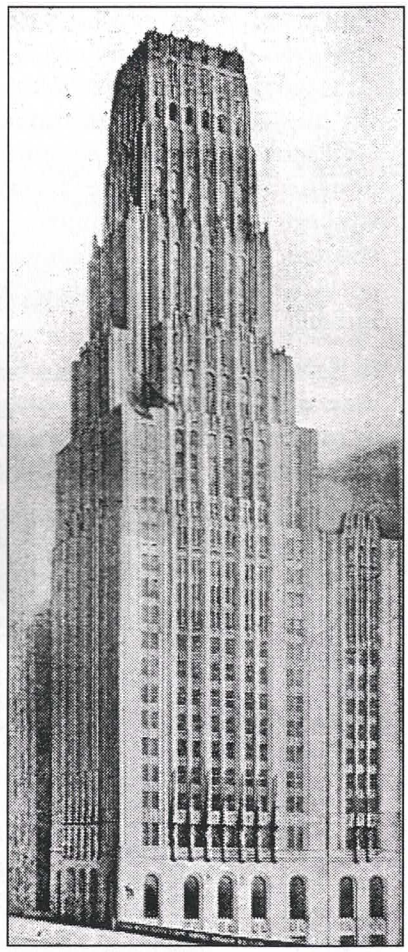
of 130 feet (groundline to cornice). This legal building height varied over the next 30 years, expanding to 260 feet in 1902, reduced to 200 feet in 1911, then raised to 264 feet in 1920. No provision for towers was provided for in the building codes of this period. Such constraints therefore encouraged blocky buildings that covered entire buildings lots, wrapped around inner lightwells, and rose straight up to the maximum height allowed by law.

In 1923, Chicago enacted its first zoning ordinance which, among other things, allowed for taller skyscrapers. High-rise buildings could rise higher than 264 feet, but only through the use of set-back towers that covered only 25 percent of the building lot. Cubic volume restrictions also affected the size and height of these skyscrapers' towers. The result was a number of soaring towers punctuating the skyline in what had been a relatively even-corniced downtown. The Steuben Club Building conforms to this new building formula.

The Gothic-revival style of the Steuben Club Building reflects another major design influence on the City of Chicago: The *Chicago Tribune* Competition of 1922. In this competition, architects from all over the world were invited to compete for a $100,000 prize to design the new headquarters for the newspaper on the newly created Michigan Avenue. Many looked to variations on the Gothic style, with its time-honored allusions to height, for design inspiration, including the competition's winner, the New York

Removal of the city's wholesale market along the river and construction of Wacker Drive stimulated office development in the North Loop. Buildings such as the Steuben Club promoted proximity to the new Wacker Drive and North LaSalle Boulevard as well as the Loop Elevated and commuter stations.





The use of setbacks by the Steuben Club building (far left) reflects both the influence of Chicago's 1923 zoning ordinance, which encouraged such design, and Eliel Saarinen's second-place entry (left) to the Chicago Tribune competition of 1922.

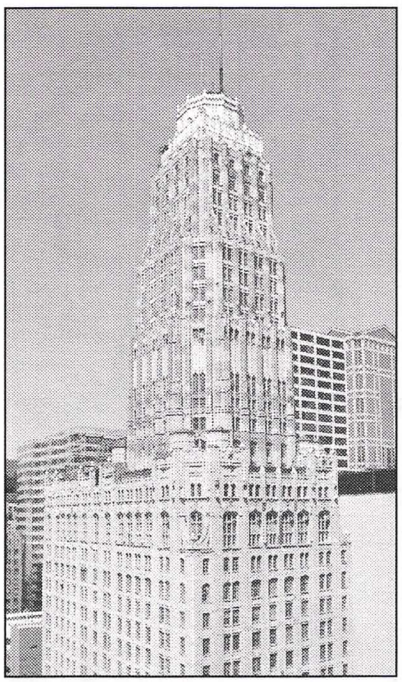
firm of Howells and Hood. Even more influential was Eliel Saarinen's second-place entry, which combined setbacks, verticality, and Gothic-style ornament in a modern synthesis of form and detailing.

After the *Tribune Tower* competition, Gothic Revival-style skyscrapers became popular, with architects continually adapting forms and details from medieval architecture to the new form of the skyscraper. These include the Mather Tower (1928; designated a Chicago Landmark), which uses traditional Gothic-style ornament for an impressively slender and vertical tower, as well as the more stylized Pittsfield Building (1927), which combined Gothic- and Art Deco-style ornament.

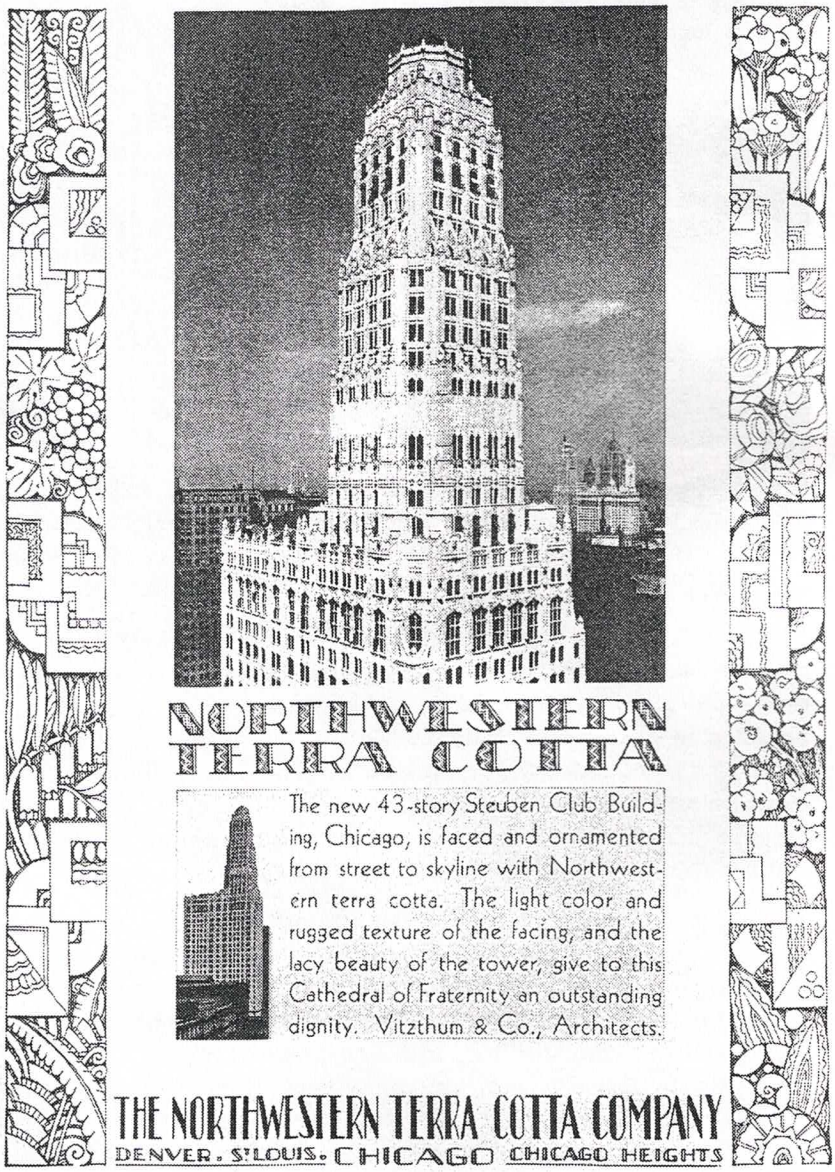
The Steuben Club Building is a dramatic interpretation of the Gothic Revival, with buttresses, setbacks and tracery making this massive steel, concrete and terra cotta structure look as light and airy as the stone cathedrals of sixteenth-century Europe. The terra cotta exterior of the building, with its elongated height, vertical emphasis and setbacks, epitomizes the popular image of the modern skyscraper of the late 1920s – here "modernizing" Gothic Revival forms and detailing through simplification and abstraction.

The finely-crafted terra cotta façade of the Steuben Club Building also exemplifies the importance of the terra-cotta industry to Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From the immediate post-Fire years of the 1870s through the early 1930s, Chicago was a leading American center for architectural terra-cotta design and manufacture. Terra cotta factories took advantage of Chicago's vibrant and innovative architectural community, its strategic location at the center of the nation's great railroad transportation network, and its proximity to clay deposits in nearby Indiana.

In Italian, terra cotta means "baked earth." For architectural purposes, however, terra cotta generally refers to building cladding or ornament manufactured from clay, hand-molded or cast into hollow blocks with internal stiffening webs, and fired at tempera-



The Steuben Club's striking polygonal tower is clad in the buff-colored, texture terra cotta of the base of the building and white, untextured terra cotta on its cap, to accentuate the tower.


NORTHWESTERN
TERRA COTTA
The new 43-story Steuben Club Building, Chicago, is faced and ornamented from street to skyline with Northwestern terra cotta. The light color and rugged texture of the facing, and the lacy beauty of the tower, give to this Cathedral of Fraternity an outstanding dignity. Vitzthum & Co., Architects.
THE NORTHWESTERN TERRA COTTA COMPANY
DENVER. ST LOUIS. CHICAGO CHICAGO HEIGHTS

An advertisement (right) from the Chicago-based Northwestern Terra Cotta Co., which produced the cladding for the Steuben Club. Glazed terra-cotta became popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century for skyscraper construction. The Steuben Club Building is one of the last great examples of such a terra-cotta–clad skyscraper.

tures higher than used for brick. Developed first to produce clay urns and garden statuary, the Chicago Terra Cotta Company—the first terra cotta company in the United States—opened in 1868 and soon expanded into architectural terra cotta production.

During the great Chicago Fire of 1871 cast-iron structural members in buildings melted in the extreme heat, and brick and granite had broken and crumbled. After the Fire, terra cotta was used to encase steel structural supports such as I-beams and columns for fireproofing. Other uses of the material included arched floor systems, partitions and as backing for exterior walls Terra Cotta soon evolved as an exterior cladding material with great decorative possibilities. Terra-cotta cornices were also in high demand because of their relative lightness (in comparison with stone) and perceived durability.

Use of terra cotta expanded when Chicago passed an ordinance in 1886 requiring that all buildings over ninety feet in height should be absolutely fireproof. Builders of skyscrapers found terra cotta an attractive medium because of its lightness, durability (crisp details did not erode over time and could easily be cleaned), and potential for decorative uses (terra cotta's plastic quality allowed for highly original ornament)—all attributes which stemmed from the nature of the material. By 1900 three important terra-cotta companies—Northwestern, American, and Midland—were headquartered in Chicago.

Glazed terra-cotta became popular in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century for skyscraper construction. Many of Chicago's finest skyscrapers of the period, ranging from such seminal landmarks as the Reliance Building (1894-95) to the Pittsfield Building (1927), were covered in terra cotta, touted for both its ease of production and maintenance. The Steuben Club Building is one of the last great examples of such a terra cotta–clad skyscraper.

Architect Karl M. Vitzthum

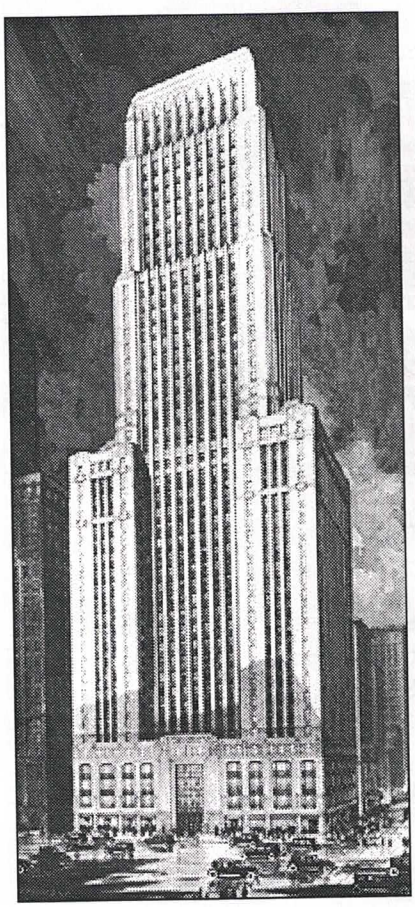
Karl M. Vitzthum (1880-1967), the architect of the Steuben Club Building, designed several distinctive Chicago skyscrapers, including the One North LaSalle Building (1930; a designated Chicago Landmark) and the Steuben Club Building. His firm, K. M. Vitzthum & Co. also designed the Bell Building (now the Old Republic Building) at 307 S. Michigan Ave. (1925) and the Midland Club Building at 276 W. Adams St. (1927).

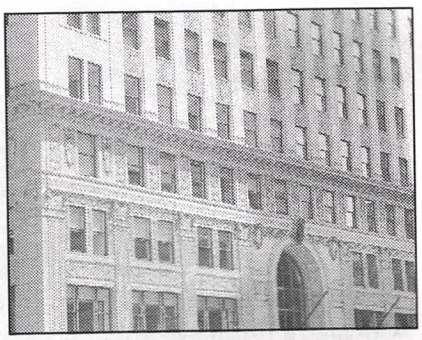
Vitzthum was born in Tutzing, Germany, and educated at the Royal College of Architecture in Munich. He emigrated to the United States in 1902, then came to Chicago twelve years later, in 1914. Vitzthum initially worked for such prominent architectural firms as D.H. Burnham & Co. and its successor firm, Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. After 1919, he headed the firm of

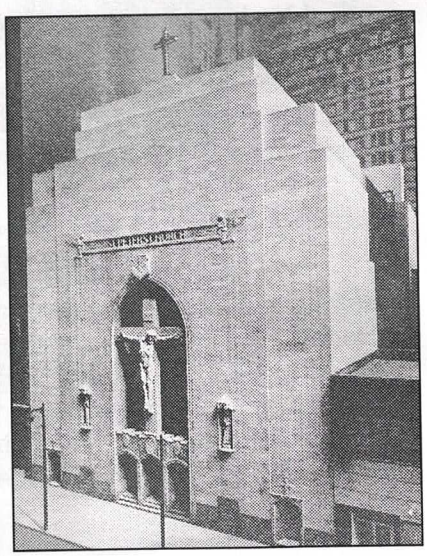
Vitzthum was born in Tutzing, Germany, and educated at the Royal College of Architecture in Munich. He emigrated to the United States in 1902, then came to Chicago twelve years later, in 1914. Vitzthum initially worked for such prominent architectural firms as D.H. Burnham & Co. and its successor firm, Graham, Anderson, Probst and White. After 1919, he headed the firm of K.M. Vitzthum & Co., which focused on the design of commercial, industrial, and large residential buildings, with his junior partner, John J. Burns.

K.M. Vitzthum & Co., which focused on the design of commercial, industrial, and large residential buildings. His junior partner, John J. Burns (1886-1956), was born in New York City and graduated from Washington University in St. Louis. The father of nine children, he lived in the Rogers Park area of Chicago and was in partnership with Vitzthum for forty years.

Vitzthum was well-known for his early twentieth-century bank architecture, designing more than fifty banks throughout the Midwest. Chicago banks designed by Vitzhum include the Hyde Park Bank at 1525 E. 53rd Street (1929), Marquette State Bank at 6314-20 S. Western Ave. (1925), the Pioneer Trust and Savings Bank at 4000 W. North Ave. (1926) and the Home Bank and Trust Company Building at 1200-08 N. Ashland Ave./1600-12 W. Division St.(1925-26, currently under consideration as a Chicago Landmark). The firm also designed ecclesiastical buildings, such as St. Peter's Catholic Church at 110 W. Madison Street (1953) and St. Thomas Aquinas Church at 4301 W. Washington Boulevard (1925).







Karl Vitzthum was an important early twentieth century architect in Chicago, responsible for some of the city's most recognizable skyscrapers, banks and religious buildings. Three of his most prominent commissions include One North LaSalle (left), the Bell Building (now the Old Republic Building at 307 N. Michigan Ave., top right), and the downtown St. Peter's Catholic Church (lower right).

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sec. 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to recommend landmark designation for a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Steuben Club Building be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Critical Part of City's History

Its value as an example of the architectural, economic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Steuben Club Building is a distinguished example of the soaring high-rises that became an important part of Chicago's skyline in the 1920s due to the city's 1923 zoning ordinance, which mandated skyscrapers with set-back towers.
- The Steuben Club Building reflects the immense growth of the Loop in the 1920s, as the traditional office areas of Chicago's downtown spread to the north and west.

Criterion 4: Important Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

- The Steuben Club is an excellent 1920s-era, Gothic Revival–style skyscraper, a skyscraper style greatly influenced by the 1922 *Chicago Tribune Tower* competition.
- The Steuben Club Building exemplifies the importance of terra cotta as a major architectural material for skyscrapers and other buildings in Chicago during the early twentieth century.
- The Steuben Club Building displays exceptional use of materials and craftsmanship in its extensive and visually dramatic use of exterior terra-cotta ornament, including pointed arches, tracery, finials, and flying buttresses.

Criterion 5: Important Architect

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, or engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- Karl M. Vitzthum, the architect of the Steuben Club Building, was an important early twentieth-century architect in Chicago,

designing several of the city's most striking 1920s-era skyscrapers, including the One North LaSalle Building (designated a Chicago Landmark).

- Vitzthum was also a significant Chicago architect of bank buildings, designing many of the city's most distinctive neighborhood banks, including the Home Bank and Trust Company Building (currently under consideration as a Chicago Landmark) and the Hyde Park Bank Building.

Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

- The Steuben Club Building, with its dramatically-scaled, Gothic-ornamented tower, is a distinctive visual presence in Chicago's Loop.

Integrity Criterion

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic, community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

The Steuben Club Building possesses excellent physical integrity, displayed through its siting, scale and overall design. It retains its historic exterior form, materials and majority of detailing.

Changes to the building include the remodeling of the original first floor, which replaced original terra-cotta cladding with simple, granite panels. The lobby, although retaining its historic configuration, was remodeled with new materials at this time. In addition, the original club rooms of the Steuben Club have long been subdivided into office space, although some original murals from the dining room remain. The Club's former swimming pool also remains largely intact and is use as part of a health club.

Significant Historical and Architectural Features

Whenever a building is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark. Based on its preliminary evaluation of the Steuben Club Building, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- all exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building.

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ILLUSTRATION SOURCES

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188 West Randolph Archive: pp. 3, 4, 9

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From *The Steuben Club. Chicago U.S.A.:* p. 8

Chicago History Museum Daily News Collection: p. 6

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Fred Danster, from St. Peter's Church dedication book, 1953: p. 12

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